

# OVAL Board Meeting (12/9/2013)

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## Attendees

Kent Landfield - McAfee Inc.  
Randy Taylor – ThreatGuard, Inc.  
Chris Wood – Assuria Limited  
William Munyan – Center for Internet Security  
Blake Frantz – Center for Internet Security  
Morey Haber – BeyondTrust, Inc.  
Jack Vander Pol – SPAWAR, U.S. Navy  
David Solin – jOVAL.org  
Jamie Cromer – Symantec Corporation

Matt Hansbury - MITRE  
Dan Haynes - MITRE  
Luis Nunez - MITRE

## Meeting Summary

### Welcome

As the Board matures, the group has begun taking on additional responsibility in the form of voting for specific, major changes and additions to the OVAL Language before they move into the official language. The implementation of the process around the voting is new, and as such requires some additional discussion and modification to ensure successful and meaningful votes.

This meeting was called to allow some discussion around the issues with the process, with the intent of modifying the process in a way that allows better and more impactful votes.

### Introduction

Dan Haynes welcomed the group to this Board call, starting by ensuring that the group was aware of a minor change made to the voting policy with regards to posting voting information to the OVAL web site. Originally, the policy was that the MITRE team would announce all votes to the web site before they occurred as well as posting the results of the vote. The updated policy reads that only the results will be posted to the web site, with the announcement of the votes continuing over the mailing lists only.

## Topics

### Abstain Votes

To begin the discussion on the specific topics of the voting process that requires attention, Dan re-capped the issues around abstain votes. The original voting policy contained only 'yes' and 'no' as options for voting. As the Board began voting in practice, it was quickly suggested that the option of an

'abstain' was desirable. The MITRE team suggested that an abstain option be allowed, and that an abstain vote would indicate that the voting organization did not have a particular opinion about the topic. However, the vote would count towards quorum.

As voting continued, several concerns were raised around abstain votes. Several members did not agree that abstain votes should count towards quorum. Others were concerned that organizations would abstain in cases where they did not fully understand the topic, which indicated an issue with the process and the amount of information available to members ahead of the vote.

Lastly, other members asked about the case where 'abstain' votes outnumbered the 'yes' and 'no' votes and how it should be handled. Some felt that in this case, the vote should not be considered valid. Others believed that there could be cases where only a subset of the Board sees fit to vote for a proposal despite the fact that the proposal could be quite important, and as such votes should still be considered valid.

Before opening up the discussion, Dan reminded the group that the intent here is to allow the Board to make informed decisions in order to shape the future of the OVAL Language and that the processes in place must serve to achieve that goal.

### *Discussion*

Once Dan laid out the issues and concerns raised over abstain voting, he opened the call to comments and questions from the group.

To start the conversation, one member shared that while he originally like the idea of abstain votes, the more consideration he gave the idea, the more he began to believe that voting should be limited to 'yes' or 'no'. The reasoning given was that abstain votes could too easily be used to avoid paying attention to a specific topic and made it too easy to focus solely on a subset of the Language. The ideal Board member is able to not only provide specific domain knowledge on topics that directly affect their organization, but is also able to help shape the Language in its entirety.

Matt Hansbury expressed concern that without abstain votes, achieving quorum would be challenging as the group narrowly reached quorum when voting to add new members which should be relatively straightforward compared to more complex Language proposals. The group generally believed, however, that ongoing changes to the Board structure to ensure maximum member participation would help alleviate this issue over time. Further, the general consensus was that Board membership should include an expectation that organizations follow the relevant discussions and participate in the majority of votes.

Another board member suggested that if members do not participate in a certain number of votes they should be removed from the Board. Matt explained that a hard-and-fast rule for removing members may not make sense just yet. Board members have other responsibilities outside of the Board and it is understood that they may not be able to participate in every vote. However, if an organization is consistently not voting, MITRE will reach out to them to see what is going on and determine how to best

move forward. The results of votes will be tracked and posted on the OVAL website and this can be used as a way to determine who is participating on a regular basis.

Lastly, several members of the Board emphasized the need for a discussion period prior to a vote. This should be covered, with the current process, because it requires community and board discussion periods before a vote.

To wrap up this topic, Dan confirmed the general consensus from the group that no abstain votes would be explicitly allowed.

### **Process Improvements**

The next topic for the call was around general process improvements. Dan introduced the part of the call by highlighting some of the concerns around the voting process that came up during the first attempts at voting.

The most important process concern was how to best ensure that the group has enough information (and in the most efficient format) to allow an informed and confident vote from each organization. It is important that each Sandbox proposal stand on its own and that information is available for each that describes both the higher level implications of the change and the deeper technical details.

Finally, Dan pointed out that Blake Frantz provided a [list of questions](#) as a proposal for the type of information that would be useful for members as they evaluate the merits of a particular proposal. The questions involve stating the use cases for the proposal as well as things like impact to authors, end users, and tool vendors.

The general consensus was that formalizing the questions proposed by Blake in a form that is required for any Sandbox contribution to be considered for inclusion in the official Language and including any other relevant information would be a good step to achieve the stated goal. Blake's proposal will be expanded to include information from the [OVAL Language Sandbox](#) page and the [Requesting Changes to the OVAL Language](#) page.

The MITRE team committed to formalizing this step as part of the process and to make a concerted effort to provide ahead of each vote a well-formatted, self-contained set of information as part of the comment period for each proposal.

### **Discussion**

After introducing the topic, Dan opened it up for discussion. This topic did not generate a lot of conversation, in part because the allotted time for the call was quickly running out. In general, consensus was achieved around the proposed process updates.

One thing that was brought up was the idea of create 'subcommittees' within the Board that would be tasked with determining things like the technical merits of specific proposals. This would achieve the goal of ensuring technical merit for each proposal, without burdening each organization with delving deeply into the technical side for each.

There wasn't a great response for this proposal, and as such for now it will be tabled. It can be re-considered at a later date.

Finally there was discussion around how deep technical review must be in order for a proposal to be considered by the Board. Some felt that a great deal of technical depth should be required to ensure implementation of the feature.

Matt Hansbury stated his belief that it is important to strike a balance between ensuring the technical feasibility of one or more features with the risk of them stagnating in the Sandbox. The Board seemed to be in consensus with this thought and also suggested that we should look to the Community and individual Board members to vet proposals without the need for a formal technical review requirement.

### **Action Items**

- MITRE team to actively monitor the Board membership to ensure appropriate level of participation of the membership in both call attendance as well as voting.
- MITRE team to update voting policy documents as appropriate to reflect decisions made during call.
- MITRE team to ensure that all Sandbox entries contain the appropriate amount of detail, including the proposed form to provide required information about the proposal.